

**Post-Event Summary Report
2005 White House Conference on Aging
Full Lives Conference Community Forum**

Name of Event: "The Future of Aging in Alaska" Full Lives Conference Community Forum

Date of Event: Thursday, April 21st, 2005, 5 pm to 8 pm

Location of Event: Anchorage Sheraton Hotel, Howard Rock Ballroom

Number of Persons Attending: 35

Sponsoring Organizations: Alaska Commission on Aging and University of Alaska's Geriatric Education Center, AARP Alaska Statewide Chapter, Older Persons' Action Group, Senior Care of Alaska, Geneva Woods

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Event Format: Participants discussed three overall issues in small groups (tables), then reported their top recommendations to the full group.

Priority Issue #1: Senior Employment

Barrier #1: Some employers are reluctant to hire older workers because of misconceptions regarding seniors' health, reliability, productivity, etc.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #1:

Educate people; teach them to respect seniors in the workplace.

There should be more publicity on the value of older workers to organizations.

Educate employers on the positive attributes of older, mature workers; they are on time, reliable, experienced, productive, have a good sense of what is important, and they keep us honest.

Educate the community and create more visibility for senior workers. And encourage older workers to serve on boards, volunteer in the community, etc.

Barrier #2: Seniors have limited avenues for learning about available jobs.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #2:

We need more programs like the MASST program. (MASST is the Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training program, run by the state's Department of Labor and Workforce Development with Title V Older Americans Act funding.)

Job centers should have older worker specialists.

Newspapers should have a "Senior Job Opportunities" section.

Employers should visit senior centers to encourage older Alaskans and let them know they are welcome in the workplace.

Barrier #3: Current laws result in loss of benefits to many seniors who work.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #3:

Seniors should be eligible to buy into Medicaid with no income cap like there is now. This prevents many seniors who want to work from doing so.

Eliminate the Social Security penalty for working at any age over 62.

Change employment laws so that they don't cause people to lose benefits for working part-time.

Barrier #4: It can be difficult for seniors to travel to and from jobs.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #4:

Improve transportation systems – accessibility, wider aisles, better attitudes, more accessible housing closer to jobs.

Increase micro-enterprise funding so seniors who wish to work at home can do so.

Barrier #5: Many seniors prefer to work on a part-time, seasonal, or temporary basis.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #5:

Offer flexible scheduling for older workers.

Priority Issue #2: Workforce Development for Senior Services

Barrier #1: Many young people have little contact with seniors and don't recognize the intrinsic value of a service career.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #1:

Teach our youth to respect elders and be able to pass on that respect to the next generation.

Emphasize the concept of “vocation” as opposed to “job.”

The public needs more education and awareness on the types of senior service jobs available and their value to the community.

Recruit more seniors to work in these service fields. Do more outreach to senior groups.

Emphasize volunteerism, especially in schools. Invite seniors into classrooms. Ensure that young people have opportunities to interact with seniors, to become aware of the rewards of working in the senior service field.

Barrier #2: Service workers need living-wage jobs with benefits in order to support their families. People are reluctant to invest in education for a career path that appears as a “dead end.”

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #2:

Providing health insurance to workers is critical.

Provide decent salaries to attract and retain workers.

People want jobs with the potential for growth. Create a professional credentialing process to allow for advancement and more attractive careers.

Barrier #3: Often potential service workers lack the funds to obtain the necessary training up front.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #3:

Provide for training of CNAs/PCAs of any age at local community colleges and workplaces without cost to the individual.

Provide students with reduced-cost loans for education in return for a commitment to working in this field.

Barrier #4: Seniors are sometimes prevented from hiring the people they would like to hire - people they trust who are ready, willing and able to do the work.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #4:

Seniors should have the choice to hire other seniors and differently-abled people as well as their own family members and friends to care for them.

Barrier #5: Service agencies frequently operate on a shoestring budget with little room for expansion of worker salaries and benefits.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #5:

Non-profit agencies need significant amounts of public donations to allow for more than “bare bones” budgets.

Priority Issue #3: Cultivating Community

Barrier #1: Seniors often don't know where to find information about the services they need.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #1:

The system of services is daunting for seniors. We need a one-stop shop to help seniors navigate the system. Often the system is so intimidating that many refuse to attempt to access it at all! We have to break down those walls. We need a list of case managers across the state. States should provide these (Older Americans Act). Community Health Aides (CHAs) in small communities could receive training in this area as well.

There should be one central organization for disseminating information.

There needs to be a very good referral system. Providence Hospital has such a system.

Barrier #2: Seniors often have misgivings about seeking and accepting help and services.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #2:

Outreach to seniors must be increased. There is a stigma for some around seeking “handouts,” including some senior services. Use well-known seniors as examples, such as Colonel Norman Vaughan in the Readicare ads – show seniors who are receiving services in a positive light.

Invite seniors to tell how they would like to be involved in the community and what services they need in order to do so.

Barrier #3: *Some services are available only to certain groups of people – some communities but not others.*

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #3:

“Keep the politics out of it!” Provide services for ALL communities, as well as the differently-abled, and other groups.

A cash voucher system allowing money to travel with the person so that they may buy or rent a home would help integrate people into the community.

Record successful programs for seniors so that communities can copy what others have done.

Barrier #4: *Other segments of the population often have very limited contact with seniors and do not recognize the extent of their contributions to the community. Seniors, in turn, can suffer from isolation and lack of integration into the community.*

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #4:

Seniors already play a vital role in our communities. We need to encourage people to take more interest in seniors now – to take time to get to know them and appreciate their contributions.

Isolation is a problem. Some seniors feel stigmatized. For those who would like to interact more with young people, perhaps day cares could be linked with senior centers, free apartment space in senior housing units could be offered to responsible college students, mixed-age housing developments could be created, and seniors could be invited to live in dorms and assist young disabled people to attend college.

Encourage high school and college students to do work/study jobs involving seniors and people with disabilities. The Anchorage school district has the ACE program, which encourages work maturity skills.

Barrier #5: *It can be difficult to get to activities in the community, especially those held at night.*

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #5:

Improvement in transportation services is needed. Many seniors won't drive at night, and transportation options are very limited for getting to evening activities in the community.